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SUBJECT: CENTRAL SULAWESI: MEDIA REPORT OF PALU BOMB PLOT TURNS OUT
TO BE UNTRUE

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: A September 30 report titled "Kids Uncover Idul Fitri Bomb Terror Plan in Palu" was carried in the English language daily, The Jakarta Post. Congen Surabaya spoke with local police, and civil society leaders knowledgeable about local media who refuted the Jakarta Post story. We learned that the material detonated by police was likely an unexploded bundle of fireworks that raised suspicions due to wire used to bind them. Fireworks are a common part of Indonesia's celebration of the Idul Fitri holiday marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan. End Summary

2. (SBU) The Jakarta Post reported that a suspected terrorist bomb was found on September 30 and detonated by police in Palu, Central Sulawesi. The suspect item was reportedly found on the eve of the last day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan--a day greeted with fireworks by Muslims throughout the city. However, no local police or media sources in Palu could confirm the key elements of the Jakarta Post story, titled, "Kids Uncover Idul Fitri Bomb Terror Plan in Palu," which described a "cell-phone detonator and blinking lights" discovered by children, according to their aunt. Central Sulawesi has a history of Muslim-Christian sectarian conflict and the two communities are careful to spot and report warning signs of renewed violence. Congen Surabaya checked with Palu police, an NGO worker, and the former head of a local media association in Palu. We confirmed that Palu print media reported that police detonated an object on September 30 near Palu Plaza Mall, but no local sources suggested that it was a terrorist's bomb.

3. (SBU) Palu Deputy Police Commissioner Yoseph directly contradicted the Jakarta Post and its quotation of a Palu police official named A.B. Sitindjak, who called it a terrorist plot. Yoseph told us police on the scene had detonated a bundle of fireworks as a precaution and had no reason to think that it was a bomb planted to cause injury. The Jakarta Post story seems to confirm this perception by quoting several witnesses who say that "police did not follow procedure" or use a blast container, but rather "exploded it in the open."

4. (SBU) Palu's local paper, Radar Sulteng, also reported the

police detonation near the Palu Plaza mall. However, Mr. Tasrif Syarif, former director of the independent journalists association, said that since it was not described as a terrorist bomb, the story was not carried in Indonesian language media outside Palu. The English language Jakarta Post appears to be the only other paper to have reported the story and the only one to have given it a terrorist spin. Accidents due to stray fireworks are common during Ramadan. Two houses in Palu were burned due to stray fireworks on September 30, according to Mr. Syarif. Mr. Sofyan Lembah, director of Central Sulawesi Child Protection Agency confirmed this and added that Idul Fitri celebrations have a great deal of loud fireworks and loose undetonated fireworks and fires are a common hazard during the holiday.

MCCLELLAND